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CHAPTER V.

THE MOST ANCIENT OF THE SURVIVING MASTER WORKS OF GRECIAN STONE.

I.

THE GATE OF LIONS OF MYCENÆ.

THE sculpture over the Gate of Lions at Mycenæ is the most ancient monument not only of Grecian Art, but, to judge from the records of history, of European sculpture generally. In our description of this remarkable work, we avail ourselves of the latest data furnished by those* who have recently visited the ruins of this hallowed spot, which in times of yore was the residence of Atreus, king of Mycenæ, and contained the acropolis of his son Agamemnon. The cyclopean grandeur of this mighty acropolis is still apparent in the remains of its massive walls, which are situated on the ridge of a rugged and conical hill, overlooking from their lofty elevation the valley of the whole Argive district. This district embraces the city of Nauplia with its rocky mountain of Palamedi, and the ruins of the ancient town of Tiryns, and the graceful curves of the Argolic gulf; the brilliant reflections of the blue, undulating sea meet the eye, and the precipitous mountain masses of Laconica, thus presenting a most picturesque panorama, instinct with majesty and radiant with beauty. The stupendous stones of which the walls of the acropolis are built correspond with the description given of them by Euripides, in his tragedy *Hercules Furens*, and from the skillful manner in which the surveyor's chain and the axe have been applied, and the precision with which the stones have been fitted to each other, they present the appearance, and seem to possess the indestructibility of natural rocks. The doorecase is formed of two massive upright blocks of stone, about fifty feet high, and twenty feet wide. This is the so-called Gate of Lions. The side-posts, which incline considerably to each other towards the top, are connected by a stupendous beam of stone, fifteen feet long and about five feet high, upon which stands the colossal bas-relief that gives the name to the gate. It represents two lionesses erect on their hind-legs, facing each other; the two animals stand on either side of a round pillar, which is also worked in basso-relievo, and which, instead of diminishing towards the top, as most other Grecian pillars do, gradually swells

in proportion as it rises. This pillar is surmounted by a capital formed of a row of four circles inclosed between two parallel fillets. The whole bears resemblance to a coat-of-arms, such as may well have belonged to one of the barons of the middle ages, some of whom, as history informs us, built their castles during the 13th century upon Grecian soil and upon the ruins of Grecian antiquity. But although such is the first impression which the sight of this famous bas-relief produces upon the fancy, the classical mind soon shrinks from such puerile suppositions, and yearns for the more solemn and authentic explanation of history. This is afforded by Pausanias, the Greek traveller and geographer, who lived under Antoninus Pius and M. Aurelius. Pausanias wrote his celebrated Itinerary of Greece in the reign of the latter emperor. His description shows that the walls of the old acropolis of Atreus presented, at the time of his inspection, the same well preserved appearance which in our day remains still unimpaired, and he speaks with particular emphasis of the cyclopean origin of the Gate of Lions. The image of a lion figured on the shield of Agamemnon, and the above-mentioned supposition about a coat-of-arms, if admitted at all, should only be taken upon the ground, that it was the first piece of heraldry of the world, or, in other words, it was the escutcheon of the king and commander-in-chief of the Achæan heroes at the siege of Troy. A pillar is the time-hallowed and well-known emblem of Apollo, and is symbolical of his divine power to afford protection to the gates of cities; the lioness-supporters* on both sides of the pillar seem to bid defiance to all intruders; suggesting, as it were, Apollo's determination to ward off all dangers and attacks upon the capital of the Grecian Cæsars. The meaning is, however, of less importance than the merits of the monument. Its stones came from the quarries of the adjacent mountains, and are of a pale grey color. The figures of the lionesses are from base to top eight feet high (we quote the very words of Hettner). "The aspect of their bodies is free and elastic; the bones, "veins, and muscles being, as in all the sculptures of "remote antiquity, wrought out with remarkable truth to "nature. Although the heads are lost, it is evident that "they were fully developed, and stood out boldly from "the relief."

In the remote antiquity of this monument, which was executed even prior to the times of Homer, we behold an eloquent witness of the remarkable Art developed

* Hettner, *Griechische Reisen-skizzen*, 1853. P. 209-214.

* They present now a mutilated appearance; the heads having been severed from the bodies and lost.

ment of the early Greeks, and of the artistic struggle which necessarily must have taken place previously, in order to advance sculpture to such a degree of perfection. The first devotees of Art in Greece seemed moreover particularly fond of reproducing figures of animals, and it is impossible to reflect upon the like tendency of the Persian, Assyrian, and Phoenician artists, as displayed in the images of animals upon the gates of the palaces and temples of their respective countries, without recognizing, once more, in this Gate of Lions of Mycenæ the footprints of Oriental influence upon the infant Art of Hellas. Julius Braun,* the sagacious archæologist, shrewdly points to the singular formation of the lions' tails. Instead of presenting at their extreme end a tufted appearance, somewhat like a knot, as we see it in nature, the Mycenæ lionesses have rather club-shaped tails, in imitation of those of the symbolical lions of the ruins of Nineveh, against which the king of Assyria waged war, and of which we find further specimen in the ruins of Persepolis. Again, we find Herodotus narrating a very old legend in reference to the foundation of the citadel of Sardis, the capital of the wealthy and powerful Croesus, the last king of Lydia, in which the lion plays a conspicuous part as emblem of impregnability, and which is evidently connected with the allegorical significance of the oldest sculptured work of the Grecians. Among the Lycean statuary discovered by Fellows, the English traveller, the lion equally occupies a prominent position.

II.

THE BASSO-RELIEVO OF SAMOTRACE.

This bas-relief was discovered in 1790 upon the island of Samothraki, in the north of the Aegean Sea, from the lofty mountain of which Homer said that Troy could be seen. This relic is at present in the Louvre at Paris, and constitutes the oldest specimen of Grecian sculpture extant, in which the human figure appears for the first time as a leading element of the work of Art. We learn from the inscriptions upon the bas-relief, that the figures represent Agamemnon, the king, seated upon his throne, attended by two heralds, Talthybios and Epeios. Whether or not this be a genuine original representation of the celebrated monarch and his heralds, or only a copy, thus much is certain, that it reflects little credit upon Grecian Art, which, as far as the representation of the human figure is concerned, painfully reveals here its infantile condition. The heads are totally void of expression, and even more false to nature than those of the Metopes of Selinunt. The same mechanical drudgery which marred the products of Egyptian Art is also perceptible, there being not the remotest attempt at distinction between the countenances of the two heralds of Agamemnon, one being simply a copy of the other. The design lacks character, and vacillates between feebleness and coarse exaggeration. The locks of hair are crudely indicated by straight parallel lines, while the whole of the

hair seems here, as in the Egyptian sculpture, modelled after a wig.

The Egyptian manner of representing attitudes and drapery again controlled the mind of the Grecian artists who executed the *SCULPTURES AT MILETUS*, consisting of sixty to seventy seated statues, which inclosed the two sides of an ancient and consecrated temple avenue. The parallel posture of the feet, the flabby arms pressed closely to the body, and hanging down like lifeless sticks, the folds of the drapery falling in straight lines, the corpse-like appearance of the whole attitude; all these still belong to the Egyptian school, and put the Miletus statues in the same category with the seated statues of Egypt. They are marked by the same columnar stiffness, the same parallel position of the limbs, which strikes us so unpleasantly in the basso-relievo of the *Leucothea* in the *Villa Albani*—the same bas-relief which, in Winckelmann's time, was proclaimed by Winckelmann as the oldest work of Grecian plastic Art in Rome. In order, however, to arrive at an authentic conception of what the oldest works really were, we cannot point to any better specimens than those at present at Palermo, discovered toward 1824, in Sicily, and known under the name of the *TEMPLE SCULPTURES OF SELINUS*, made of tuffo, and consisting of the ruins of three temples, one the citadel of the ancient city of Selinus, which was founded by the Dorians, on the eastern coast of Sicily, b. c. 628, and taken in 409 by the Carthaginians, who destroyed the greater part of that city. These dates establish the fact that the sculptures of Selinus, especially the most ancient specimens, which decorated the central temple, were executed in the times of Solon, a hundred years before the advent of Phidias, and about seventy years before that of the last of the Dædalites, Dipœnos and Scyllis, those time-hallowed artists, whose names are indissolubly connected with the first effort to quicken with the living breath of Grecian genius the Arts which were palsied by the deadly influence of Oriental lethargy. These bas-reliefs of Selinus served to embellish the metopes on the outer part of the temples, and are the *only authentic* remains of the oldest style of the infantine period of Grecian Art, while they are at the same time the only specimens that have come down to us, about the time and purpose of which we are *fully informed and free from doubt*.

There are two powerful reasons which commend the Selinuntian reliefs to the particular attention of all friends of Art. The basso-relievi of the oldest of the three temples represent episodes from the lives of Hercules and Perseus; that connected with Hercules is of a humorous character. We find mythology abounding in tragic legends of this the most celebrated of all the heroes of antiquity; but there are also comic legends of this demi-god; among others occurs the story of the cercopes, Passalos and Aclemon, two droll and thievish gnomes, who for a time amused Hercules with their provoking tricks; but presuming too much upon his good humor, they dared to rob him in his

* *Studien und Skizzen aus den Ländern der alten Kultur.* P. 342.

sleep ; Hercules made prisoners of them, and fastened them to a stick, and dragged them after him head over heels, until the jokes of the little rogues, which they continued to put forth, undaunted by the scrape in which they found themselves, softened the wrath of Hercules, and led him to restore them to liberty. This drollery is illustrated by one of the bas-reliefs. Another bas-relief represents Perseus, protected by Athena, in the act of cutting off Medusa's head, he turning his face away to avoid a sight of the monster which would have transformed him to stone. These old specimens of Grecian Art reveal the worst features of barbarism, being unredeemed by the remotest touch of beauty. The proportions of the bodies are heavy and clumsy, and although we find attempts made to give the character of the muscles, the whole appearance is that of deformity. In the Hercules, for instance, who is represented as about four and a half feet high, the lower parts of the legs are out of all proportion to the upper part of the thigh, the latter, as far up as the groin, being much too large, while the former are much too small ; and as for the hero's breast, its immoderate swelling has the appearance of that of a female. Contrary to all traditional records, which represent Hercules with a club, he is made to wear a sword, that is suspended in a singularly horizontal manner over the upper part of his back. The upper parts of the human figure are made to appear in full by these early Grecian sculptors, while the thighs and legs appear in slight relief. Here again they follow in the footsteps of the Egyptians, who adopted this system in order to invest bas-reliefs with the same character as statues. The contracted and smiling corners of the mouth are also thoroughly Egyptian, as well as the careful arrangement of the hair. The Medusa is a most grotesque caricature, showing what a period had to elapse before the revolting ugliness of this clumsy attempt at Art could be superseded by the tragical grandeur of a Medusa Rondanini. The unseemly, ungainly, long-bodied horse on Medusa's left is intended for Pegasus, the celebrated winged horse, of whom she was said to have been the mother, and Neptune the father. Minerva's drapery has the old conventional ungraceful folds ; Perseus is apparelled in a species of apron, while the artist seems to have had a vague intention of hinting at something by which to fasten it to the body. The appearance of the figures is as motionless as that of persons who are asleep. Indeed it would seem as if the first younglings of Art, like the offspring of some species of animals, came blind into the world.

A third and much more extensive bas-relief of the same temple represents a biga (a chariot drawn by two horses), with a cavalier on each of the two sides, giving it the appearance of a quadrigas (one drawn by four horses). The chariot and the horses are in a better state of preservation than the figure of the driver, of which the upper part is destroyed, excepting the head and the right hand. This bas-relief shows considerable improvement in the workmanship ; the four feet of the horses are visible as

they actually advance in full gallop. The horse-shoes and feet are very carefully treated ; the heads are small, and the whole body bears evidence of a laborious study of Nature. Thus we find in the Art development of all nations, that genius is always first applied to the representation of the figures of animals. The ruins of a second temple consist of two bas-reliefs, representing victorious Amazons, both having triumphed over their antagonists ; one of these, having received a wound on the right knee, and being on the point of falling down, supports himself by leaning with his left hand upon the ground, while the right arm was evidently lifted up in self-defence. The arm is missing, the two bas-reliefs being broken in the centre, and only the lower part of the Amazons, up to the girdle, is in a state of preservation. Yet in spite of this mutilated condition, a certain spirited character is perceptible in the posture and expression of this bas-relief, which contrasts favorably with the grotesque and awkward appearance of the first relief. The Amazon of the fourth basso-rilievo puts her foot upon the body of the fallen warrior. The management of her drapery shows a decided improvement in correctness and boldness of design upon that of Minerva. The form of the reclining upper thigh appears clearly through the transparent drapery, and even the less transparent part of the wearing apparel is invested with some expression. Of the two vanquished warriors, some of whose characteristics are brought out with singular prominence, we find one lying upon his back, leaning upon his arm, his right hand warding off the deadly blow, his head, of which the helm is just falling off, being in a deflected position. His countenance seems agitated, as if he had just emitted a cry of anguish. He wears a beard like the Trojans, as represented under the Aeginetan gable statues. The cannibal materialism of the whole expression can only be defined by characterizing it as something bordering upon the horrible ; in fact, it baffles all description. The grinning mouth is half opened, showing the teeth and the tongue ; the beard is a compound of little curls ; a monstrous moustache covers the area between lip and chin ; and the play of the muscles is apparent even through the armor.

Various colors were evidently used in these sculptures, especially red and blue. The pupils, eyelashes, and eyebrows of Minerva are painted in black. The same variety of color is apparent in the two bas-reliefs of the third temple ; one representing Minerva in the act of felling a warrior to the ground ; and the other, Diana inflicting punishment upon Actæon. This episode is treated with great vigor. Actæon is in terrible conflict with his fifty dogs, who are let loose upon him by the infuriated goddess, whose anger he provoked by boasting that he excelled her in hunting. His left hand grapples one of the dogs, and while he strives with the other hand to cope with another dog that has made a fearful set upon his throat, the rest of the canine army attack him on the legs. His change into a stag, in which form he was torn to pieces by the dogs, is

indicated by a stag's head, with long antlers, an outline of which is painted over the figure of Actæon.*

The works which we have enumerated give a sufficiently clear idea of the condition of Art among the Greeks in the remotest antiquity. But in order to ascertain how far it was advanced at the time when Phidias and his contemporaries made their appearance, the surviving masterworks of the preceding era demand our special investigation. The works alluded to consist of the *Æginetan* gable statues, or the sculptures which occupied the tympana of the pediment of the temple of Jupiter, and which are at present at Munich. A few words of explanation on the subject of temple gables, and the manner in which they were decorated by the ancients, are indispensable in order to arrive at a proper and intelligent appreciation of this celebrated work.

THE RICH AND THE POOR MAN.

By his lonely hearth the rich man stood;
At his heart that gnawing pain,
That hunger, to which all worldly good
May but minister in vain;
Which, once awakened, love's own sweet food
Alone may assuage again.

That yearning to some one kindred heart,
Which alone might beat sweet time
To its every throb, and so bear part
As to blend each changing chime
Of joy and sorrow, with magic art,
In one harmony sublime.

But never on earth his soul may thrill
To such sweet life-music more;
One only to sway its chords hath skill,
And her work below is o'er:
Lonely, but patient, he life's steep hill
Must climb, to death's gracious door.

By his cheerless hearth the poor man sate;
Wife, children, around him wailed,
Whom fruits of his toil sustained, till late
Both toil and its fruits had failed:
And now at their hearts stern hunger ate,
And the strong man's courage quailed.

But feller guests in his bosom raged
Than hunger itself may be;
The foaming hate of a lion caged
Against foes he doth not see;
Fierce envy of man, all unassuaged
By trust in God's mercies free.

And ever it hardened more and more,
(Good angels! Oh, shield from sin!)
The scowl that darkened his features o'er,
His features so fierce and thin:
While despair stood knocking at the door
Just opening to let him in.

The rich man stepped to his brother's side;
He proffered his bounteous aid,

* *Über die seleniunitischen Skulpturen s. ein Jahr in Italien II.*,
p. 92-97.

But curdled his pity's generous tide,
And he half shrank back, afraid,
As, clutching the gold, the poor man eyed
The giver, but no word said.

But prompt were the mother's tears and prayers
On her children's saviour's head

To call down blessings; forgot her cares:

“And hast thou no thanks,” she said,

For the good man Heaven sends unawares
To bring our darlings bread?”

“Thanks!” with a bitter sneer he spake,
And a brow as hard as stone—

“The lordly squire his fill doth take,

And he throws his dog the bone!

Who should relieve, but the rich, who make
The ills beneath which we groan?”

No flash of anger responsive spread

On brow of the rich man; he
Had mercy learned while his own heart bled;

And “Listen,” he said, “to me:

I was once a poor man, and ate bread
In sweat of my brow like thee.

“There was one who toiled, and loved, like me,
And at last we dared to wed,

And when smiled a babe upon her knee,

We thought care for aye was fled;
But that blossom faded soon, and we

Laid the turf above its head.

“And when wealth had come at my command,
Then she whom I toiled for, she,

The mother, died too:—Now lay thine hand
On thine heart, and answer free!

Wouldst thou take my wealth, at price to stand
Alone on God's earth like me?”

The poor man looked where his pale wife stood,
And their children around her drew,
To each one sharing the welcome food
And it welled forth strong anew,
The deep love choked in despairing mood,
When feeling to torture grew.

And his hurried breath came thick and hot,
And his tears flowed fast and free,

Till his softened brow its scowl forgot:

“God pardon my sin,” said he;

“I knew not till now a rich man's lot

More bitter than mine might be!”

* * * * *

Forth daily to toil the poor man fares,
By his brother's care supplied,
And daily with his beloved ones shares.
The food his strong arms provide;
And, humbled, thinks amid all his cares
Of the rich man's lone fireside.

Still treads, as patient he long hath trod,
The rich man life's lone, steep hill;

And when at moments beneath the rod

His spirit would quail, thinks still

Of the poor man: “Mine are safe, thank God,”
He saith, “from all earthly ill!”

MARY C. HUME.